China Officials' Negligence Blamed For Deadly Fire

The Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese authorities have filed criminal charges against nearly a dozen public officials blamed for the high death toll in a fire last month that killed 121 people [1] in a poultry plant in the northeast.

China's top prosecuting agency has charged 11 public officials — including a township head, local building officials, a township police chief, and several fire officials — with dereliction of duty, according to a report Friday in the agency's official publication, Jiancha Daily.

The June 3 fire was triggered by a short circuit, but investigators found that the Jilin Baoyuanfeng Poultry Co. plant violated safety regulations, including having safety exits blocked at the time of the fire. China's work safety agency has blamed the local government for negligence in oversight and inspection.

Jiancha Daily said local township officials, including those in charge of building quality, had failed to properly inspect the plant, which was rife with fire hazards such as substandard building materials. The report said police had not taken any action against the poultry plant despite its failure to hold fire drills, provide safety training or install sufficient fire-extinguishing equipment.

The plant's owners and managers have been detained, and its assets have been frozen.

The fire was China's deadliest industrial accident in five years and highlighted the continuing gross neglect of worker safety, despite the growth and sophistication of the world's second-largest economy.

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